

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A problem solving support apparatus for supporting problem solving for electronic device users based on user input on how to use the device, the device comprising:

a related icon storage section which stores a plurality of icons, which are images having appearance conceptually associated with at least a part of an entry word, in association with the entry word which specifies problem solving functions of the electronic device;

a candidate icon display section which displays at least a part of the plurality of icons that are candidates for accepting selections from outside on a screen; and

an entry word extract section which refers to said related icon storage section to extract the entry word and display the extracted entry word based on combinations of two or more icons when the two or more icons are selected from the icons on the screen displayed by said candidate icon display section.

2. The problem solving support apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein

said related icon storage section comprises:

an entry word storage section which stores a plurality of element words indicating concepts of the functions of the entry word in association with the entry words; and

a corresponding element word storage section which stores the icons having the appearance conceptually associated with the element word in association with each of the plurality of the element words, and

said entry word extract section refers to said corresponding element word storage section to extract the

element word which corresponds to each of two or more icons, refers to said entry word storage section to extract the entry word which corresponds to at least two element words among the element words from said entry word storage section, and displays the extracted entry word when the two or more icons are selected.

3. The problem solving support apparatus as claimed in claim 2, wherein said corresponding element word storage section associates at least one of the element words with the plurality of icons and stores them.

4. The problem solving support apparatus as claimed in claim 3, wherein said corresponding element word storage section associates at least one of the icons with the plurality of element words and stores them.

5. The problem solving support apparatus as claimed in claim 2, further comprising an element word display section which displays the element word corresponding to the tentatively selected icon when the icon is tentatively selected.

6. The problem solving support apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said entry word extract section requires an input of a decision command for search after two or more icons, among the plurality of icons displayed on the screen by said candidate icon display section, are selected, and displays the entry word triggered by the input of the decision command for search.

7. The problem solving support apparatus as claimed in claim 6, further comprising a select icon display section which displays the two or more selected icons on the screen.

8. The problem solving support apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a candidate icon regulating section which refers to said related icon storage section to extract other icons which correspond to said entry word corresponding to the selected icon and receives selections of the other extracted icons when the icon is selected among the icons on the screen displayed by said candidate icon display section.

9. The problem solving support apparatus as claimed in claim 8, wherein said candidate icon regulating section displays the extracted icons excluding the other icons stored in said related icons storage section on the screen.

10. The problem solving support apparatus as claimed in claim 8, wherein said candidate icon regulating section distinguishes the extracted icons from the other icons stored in said related icon storage section and displays them on the screen.

11. The problem solving support apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said entry word extract section displays the entry word on the screen when the number of the extracted entry words is less than a predetermined number.

12. The problem solving support apparatus as claimed in claim 11, wherein said entry word extract section displays the entry word on the screen when the number of the entry words to be displayed on the screen is less than the predetermined number.

13. The problem solving support apparatus as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:

an execution program group storage file which stores an execution program for executing the functions for the problem solving which correspond to entry words specifying the functions of the electronic devices for the problem solving; and

a processing section which refers to said execution program group storage file to execute the execution program corresponding to the specified entry words when an execution command for the displayed entry word is input.

14. A method for supporting problem solving for electronic device users based on user input on how to use the device, comprising steps of:

storing a plurality of icons, which are images having appearance conceptually associated with at least a part of an entry word, in association with the entry word which specifies problem solving functions of the electronic device;

displaying at least a part of the plurality of icons that are candidates for accepting selections from outside on a screen;

referring to the related icon storage section to extract the entry word based on combinations of two or more

icons when the two or more icons are selected from the icons displayed on the screen; and

displaying the extracted entry word.

15. A computer readable medium storing thereon a program for supporting problem solving for electronic device users based on user input on how to use the device, wherein the program causes a computer to function as:

related icon storage means for storing a plurality of icons, which are images having appearance conceptually associated with at least a part of an entry word, in association with the entry word which specifies problem solving functions of the electronic device;

candidate icon display means for displaying at least a part of the plurality of icons that are candidates for accepting selections from outside on a screen; and

entry word extract means for referring to said related icon storage means to extract the entry word and display the extracted entry word based on combinations of two or more icons when the two or more icons are selected from the icons on the screen displayed by said candidate icon display section.

16. A problem solving support system for supporting problem solving for electronic device users based on user input on how to use the device, comprising a problem solving support apparatus stored in the electronic device and a user input device which is a separate unit of the problem solving support apparatus, wherein said problem solving support apparatus comprises:

a related icon storage section which stores a plurality of icons, which are images having appearance

conceptually associated with at least a part of an entry word, in association with the entry word which specifies problem solving functions of the electronic device;

a candidate icon display section which displays at least a part of the plurality of icons that are candidates for accepting selections from outside on a screen; and

an entry word extract section which refers to said related icon storage section to extract the entry word and display the extracted entry word based on combinations of two or more icons when the two or more icons are selected from the icons on the screen displayed by said candidate icon display section, and

said user input device receives input from the users for selecting an icon from the plurality of icons displayed on said candidate icon display section and outputs it to said entry word extract section.